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BIOGRAPHY OF AN AMERICAN

SOBOTSKOY Tcherin Tschich

1. My parents' background and my close relatives.

1) My father's name is SOBOTSKOY Tu Namisovich. I do not know his exact birthdate but I suppose that it was somewhere between 1870-1873. Nationality - Circassian. Our family used to live always in the village (aul) *Chalchikha* which is now the center of a rayon in the Antonovskiy oblasti of the KUBAN. My father was a farmer and owned about 50 acres of land. Tobacco and wheat were the main crops. Besides that, my father was raising cavalry horses. For the aul he maintained a small drove of horses, had 6-7 cows and few hundred heads of sheep. Hired help was used. According to Soviet documents my father belonged to the Kulak class and later on was as such dispossessed. My father had never a position in any kind of administration and was not presented prior to the establishment of the Soviet government.

From 1930 the Soviet government confiscated cavalry horses from my father's farm. In 1930 the complete collectivization was put into effect. Rumors started spreading among the Circassians, that in the new Kolkhozes all Circassians will have to sleep under one cover and in one building. The inhabitants of six big villages decided to go to the city of Krasnodar in order to deal with pitchforks and axes the collectivization. My father participated in this march. On the banks of the river Kuban they were stopped. The womenfolk was sent home, but the men arrested, among them my father. Some of the participants were let free after a very short time but my father was kept till 1931.

When my father returned from prison, our village (aul) had become a kolkhoz. The kolkhoz had taken over our land, our livestock, our barn which we used to process our tobacco crop, and two livestock barns which were destroyed and the lumber carried away. Only one cow was left for our family. However, our family could not become members of the kolkhoz. All this amounted to a plain act of robbery (razbitchivaniye). In 1933 no kolkhoz members of the kolkhoz but only my father and mother were permitted to work there. The responsibility for the sowing and the growing of wheat belonged to three elderly men in our kolkhoz. One of them was my father. In 1936 they sowed the wheat by hand without using the proper machinery.

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For one reason or the other this year the wheat did not sprout. The three old men were accused as "wreckers" and arrested. My father was in prison till 1933. During this time only my mother and I belonged to the kolkhoz. 1933 my father returned from prison but had to work from now on as a regular kolkhoznik.

In 1943 the Soviets occupied again our village after the retreat of the Germans. A group of Soviet partisans were the first ones to enter our village. Among them was a Circassian PETRUSH Terruk. He arrested three elders, among them my father, and executed them near our barn, because they had allegedly helped the Germans. Actually, these elders had only collected money among the villagers in order to throw a big party for two German Generals who had visited our village. At that time I was not home and learned about father's execution only at a later date.

2) My mother Eady Kurash was 6 to 7 years younger than my father. She was never apprehended. I lost contact with her after my evacuation with the retreating Germans, which happened around February 1943. Since then I never have heard anything from her. Much later some other Circassians told me that she has died in 1947.

3) My brothers and sisters:

Altogether I had six sisters and four brothers. 5 sisters and two brothers are dead. One sister died 1926-27 during a childbirth. The rest died 1921 during a cholera epidemic. Mother used to tell me how the cholera had finished up most of our family. All this has happened before my birth, therefore I do not know any details. Two of my deceased sisters left boys behind them. The son of one sister was called Mahmud and of another - Kaderbech. The latter was older than I.

4) The name of my alive brother is SOQBTSOP, Mos; born December 12, 1906. He lived with the family till 1931. In this year my father returned from prison and my brother broke officially with his parents in order to obtain the confidence of the Soviet government. Our family belongings were not divided on this occasion because we did not have any. He went to Krasnodar and worked as a locksmith in a nail factory. 1932 he became a member of the Communist Party. 1935 he returned to our village and became chairman of our village kolkhoz. He lived separated from us and tried not to have any contact with us. 1936 he was sentenced to two years of hard labour for not having fulfilled the annual grain delivery quota of our kolkhoz as established by the contract. Actually my

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brother had delivered the requested amount of grain, but he had not sold the surplus of it to the government but had distributed it among the kollezniki, about 2.5 kilo roubles for each labour day. My brother was brought first to the prison of Krasnodar and after that to a labour colony for forced labour near the same city. 1937 was the year of the great purge, known by the name Jozhovshchina. Mass arrests started and my brother was transferred for interrogation from the colony into a prison belonging to the oblasti NKVD in Maikop. There was the following reason for it: An old emigrant, Kilich Girey who was living abroad had written a letter via Turkey to his relatives including the following phrase "With God's help I shall return, and we will meet again". This letter became known to the chief of the oblasti NKVD Dolgopiatov. He interpreted this sentence that way, that the emigrants are planning an overthrow of the Soviet regime and a return of all emigrants to their homeland. Mass arrests started at once. There was hardly a family who did not suffer great losses. All prisons were overflowing. My brother was being questioned too. The investigation continued up to 1938, till finally Dolgopiatov himself was arrested as an "enemy of the people". Now some of the arrested were set free, among them was my brother. For some months he was unemployed. He asked the Party to be reinstated but to no avail. Soon he became manager of our village store which belonged to the village soviet. 1937 he was arrested again because he had failed to report to the authorities the two emigrants who had come and landed in the store. Under the criminal law paragraph 111 he was sentenced to 1 1/2 year prison for neglect of duties. 1939 he was released and got a job with a local construction outfit. 1941 he was arrested and investigated by the Krasnodar NKVD; what for -- I do not know.

Shortly before the war started he was released and returned to his old job, where he remained till the beginning of the war. From there on we were always together.

5) My sister Suret Alekserishe was born in about 1921. She lived with us until about 1934/39, then she got married to a veterinary of our region. In the beginning of the war he was called into the army as a captain - veterinary. Fall 1941 he came on furlough from Krasnodar to our village. Since then we lost contact with him. 1957 I learned from other Circassians who had some information from our village that my sister is actually living there. I, personally, never tried to contact her.

I have no other close relatives in the Caucasus. After the evacuation by the Germans I neither received nor wrote letters to my village.

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MY PERSONAL EXPERIENCE

My Childhood

I was born on 12.12.21, in the village (vill) of ...  
village center of the ... I lived  
with my parents until 1937. I entered the local  
school (one-teacher) and finished it in 1937. I continued in  
the second grade two years. In 1939 this school was changed into  
a 5th school (one-teacher) and I graduated from the eighth  
grade. Spring, 1939 having finished the eighth grade I became  
bookkeeper in the administration of our village. I had to re-  
sister the workdays of each school-year. I worked for 0.75  
work days per each day I worked. I did not plan to finish  
high school, because I wanted to join the army; but uniform and  
impressed me very much. Beside that I knew that some vill-  
inhabitants had gotten better jobs than others after having  
served in the army.

The secretary of our villa o Soviet Redi Koll was a remote  
relative of my mother. I he had him to change the date of my  
birth, so that I could be drafted in fall 1941. He obliged me  
I was about to be drafted. I had a letter of that I was a doctor  
and thrown into jail. With two other boys also were about to  
be drafted we went to a restaurant, not drink was insulted the  
waitress there with ugly words. Then the criminal law para-  
graph 78, we three were sentenced to one year prison for im-  
proper behavior (neposidnyost), the first two weeks we were  
in a local prison in Aramochi. Most of the imprisoned, in-  
cluding me, were then transferred to Mjelotok in order to  
build there a big military airport. There we worked till the war  
started.

My AICL and conscription

June 22, 1941 After having received the news about the  
outbreak of the war, we were assembled at 4 o'clock in the  
village and marched off in an unknown direction. We marched two  
days without rest. On our second day our group was split in  
two parts. In one group were all who had only short ter-  
m sentences, in the other the political prisoners were gathered.  
The political prisoners were deported to the city of  
Mjelotok in order to be there before the war started and to  
be drafted into the army as conscripts of the great Patriotic.  
When we started on this march we saw very few people, till the  
end of the march even they had disappeared. We arrived at  
the camp located 4 kilometers from Mjelotok. There we were is-  
sued all these "certificates of probable release" (spravka o  
veroyatnoy osvobodimosti), because they had been made up already.

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I arrived in this camp with the last group and when I asked for my certificate, it was missing. However, another one was made up at once and handed to me. Laying all received the above mentioned certificates we were supposed to go to England and present ourselves to a drafting board (Voenkomat) in order to be drafted. Instead of doing this I went home to the Caucasus. Two weeks after my arrival in the village my friend Gusev visited me. He had been sentenced to 5 or 6 years hard labour and had worked with me at the construction of the military airport in Khabarovsk. He did not belong to the short term group and could not be released prematurely for this reason he could not get the certificate. So in order to receive it Gusev had used my name and had obtained my certificate. Now he was here as - a double of me. He asked me not to report him and he promised to go to Krasnoar at once to get himself a position under my name and after that not to return to our village. I agreed.

Service in a labour battalion

I stayed home till fall 1941 and did not work anywhere. September/October 1941 our entire village youth, me and my brother included were drafted into some labour battalions. We all were dispatched to a Cossack village (Khasays) near the river Kuban. We did not receive neither uniforms nor weapons. We had to dig there trenches. First we worked near the city of Taganrog close to Kostov. We were digging trenches and building fortifications. That way we were alternately working or retreating the whole winter. Spring 1942 we were already near Armavir. A rumor started spreading that we would be shipped to dig ditches in the Crimea. This I did not like. I went home and returned home. There I was hiding in the woods and came visiting my mother only at nights. This way I lived until the Germans arrived in August 1942.

My life under the Germans

August 1942 the Germans seized the Autonomous Krasnodarskiy Oblast and soon they established a new civil administration in our region. The Germans based their rule on the "Council of the Elders" because these supported them enthusiastically. Upon the recommendation of the "Council of the Elders" the Germans installed my future father-in-law as chief of our region. He was held in very high esteem by the Germans and they asked him even to move for this purpose from another district into ours. Under the Soviets he used to be chief of supplies in one of the local guard units protecting our water supplies. He never was a card carrying member of the party.

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Upon the recommendation of the "Council of the Elders" I was installed as head of our local militia. I was asked to appear before the "Council of the Elders" and there the Germans looked at me with a moment's consideration as such responsibility carrying such a responsibility. But I told him that I was born in 1913. After that the Germans gave me the position. Here I was subordinated to the Chief of the raion who was my future father-in-law.

My responsibilities were:

- a. To lead the fight against the Soviet partisans.
- b. To catch people who were maintaining contacts with the Soviet partisans.
- c. To prevent the flow of supplies to the Soviet partisans.
- d. To assist the Germans in requisitioning food and supplies from the population.
- e. To search houses for hidden Soviet uniforms. The Germans needed these uniforms very much.
- f. To maintain law and order in our village.

We caught altogether 6 Soviet partisans and turned them over to the Germans. Some Russian families kept on living in our village, they were mostly former employees of banks or finance institutions. There was always an inherited danger that these people might establish clandestine communications with the Soviet partisans. Therefore the local police force had to evacuate them. I held this position till January 1943.

My service in the German Army

End of January 1943 I voluntarily joined the German army and was sent to the 35th battalion, where soldiers were former PO. belonging to the different Caucasian nationalities. This battalion was holding defense position in the Cosack village Kaluzhinskaja of the Krasnodar kray. C.O. of the battalion was a German captain Krupnik. C.O. of the first company, to which I belonged was a Circassian from our village, Dzepsb Turuz (he is at the present time in Turkey, but is planning to emigrate to the U.S.A.).

Turuz being present I told the battalion C.O. that I had finished the military academy in Ordzhonikidze, that I had served in the army as a lieutenant and that I had gone AWOL. Turuz knew that this was not the truth but he confirmed anyway what I had said and then upon his recommendation the battalion C.O. put me in charge of a platoon with the rank of a platoon commander. Our battalion was moved February 1943 in Kaluzhinskaya. At this time the Soviets started their attacks along the entire front line and the Germans began to retreat. He had pitched

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battles around the village, around Arushovsk and in some other places. We even participated in the defense of the Kuban front head. The defense could be maintained there till the end of 1943.

August 1943 I was wounded in my right shoulder and sent to a German military hospital in the town of Melitopol. There I remained till October/November 1943.

Released from the hospital I was sent to the Caucasian legion, which at that time was being assembled near Warsaw. I belonged to this legion till January 1944. Then I was transferred to a battalion "Mergart" in the Caucasus, which was holding defense positions near the city of ... To this unit I went again, German military travel orders.

#### My Participation in the Evacuation of People belonging to the Nationalities of the Caucasus.

Having arrived in Odessa I had my papers checked with the local German commandant. This was necessary in order to obtain permits for the night. Leaving his bulding I suddenly met there the German lieutenant General von Foerster, whom I knew well since he had been once in my home village where he had been greeted with all due honours. I told him all about me and he asked me to come the next day to his headquarters. When I arrived there he explained to me the situation as follows: There are great masses of Circassian and Kabardin escapees in Odessa, around 3000 people. These people have come from the Caucasus and now want to go West but the Romanians are not permitting them to drive through their country unless they have German military leaders. For this a man from the Caucasus who speaks German and some Caucasian languages is necessary. Von Foerster put me then in charge of this people and changed accordingly my travel orders. This new job was to my liking and I agreed gladly. New travel orders were issued to me. Simultaneously orders to all German commandants in Romania were given ordering them to render me all the needed assistance to provide me and my group with food and quarters. When I joined this wagon train I met there many old friends, among them my brother, my future father-in-law and his daughter whom I married during the trip in 1944. This train had about 800 wagons.

February/March 1944 I led the wagon train through the town of Komatantsu and we reached Floesti. April 1944 I got married to Goshnasho Dzhamirze who was travelling in our train. She is a Circassian, born 1926 in the village Pchogatlukay of the

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Ponezhsknevskego raion of the Autonomous Adygeyskoj oblasti.

by work as a recruiter for the Caucasian units of the German Army.

In Ploesht we received all of a sudden an order from the Germans to surrender our weapons and horses to the German army. This was a terrific blow to our entire group of escapees. I simply could not do this and therefore stepped down from my post. My brother had a certificate of health which stated that he was suffering from TB in a severe form. I obtained this certificate as mine and with its help obtained a travel order to a Caucasian volunteer Unit near Berlin. The German commandant issued a travel order for me and five other people. I took with me my brother, my wife and three people from our native village.

June/July 1944 we all arrived in Berlin where I reported to a North Caucasian Committee which gave shelter to my travel companions. I myself went to the H.Q. of the Caucasian Volunteer Units and met there Major General Heidendorf. He is at the present time in Western Germany. He offered me the job of a recruiter for the Caucasian volunteer Legion. All new recruited people had to be dispatched to a place near Warsaw. The recruitment was supposed to take place in the camps in Austria, Hungary and CZE. Having received this order I gathered my group and August/September we arrived in Hungary. I was there busy for 1 1/2 months. I also was in Vienna and Graz but never went to the USA. I was not able to recruit any body because by now it had become apparent that Germany was about to lose the war. 1944 I left Hungary and returned without being able to show any successes to Berlin. My group remained in Hungary. I reported to General Heidendorf who became highly indignant about my performance and ordered me to return to Berlin the following day. Which I never did. In the Committee for the North Caucasian I met Colonel Ul'raj. He was a Cossack and colonel of the old Czar army. Later on he had become rather famous in Albania. You were a colonel of the SS and Division Commander of a North Caucasian Division which was in the process of assembling. His superior was a German Sturmbannfuhrer (colonel) Teiermann. The latter got also to call up General Heidendorf and informed that I had joined the SS. Heidendorf never bothered me anymore.

With the consent of Teiermann, Ul'raj gave me the rank of "Ober-sturmfuhrer" and I was again supposed to recruit Caucasians, but now for this division. There were recruiters a plenty. Among them a Shalichanov who is now in Turkey,

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and a Bedunokov who later was turned over to the Soviets. I was supposed to recruit again in Austria and Hungary.

Arriving in Austria I established my office in Marko-Kopuzka. My helpers were my group - including my wife and three fellows, which, however, busied themselves mostly with black marketing. They carried cigarettes from Hungary into Austria. No recruitment took place because nobody wanted to volunteer. So we lived until March 1945.

#### The retreat of our groups into Austria.

March 1945 the German Army started her general retreat. I decided with my group to go to the Austrian city Villach where my father-in-law was living at that time. On our way there my wife gave birth to a baby. We stopped in the village Neudorf near Villach. There we learned that Ulazay's SS Division had been transferred to Italy and was stationed near the town of Bolzeca. We decided not to join them, but to wait for the end of the war right there.

Our SS Div. and many other escapees moved now from Italy into Austria and got themselves quarters near Trauburg. End of April 1945 our group joined them, but my father-in-law remained in Villach.

#### Our flight to Italy

May 1945 Germany surrendered. Our camp in Ober Trauburg sheltered about 10,000 emigrants. Because this was the assembly point for the people from the North Caucasus. May 1 the first English motorcyclists appeared. Rumors started spreading that the English are going to turn over all Soviet citizens to the Soviets. To forestall this our committee was elected which had besides me the following members:

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received as a lieutenant in the NKVD, I did not know the price  
 idea what it could have been, so I named it, 2,000 rubles. It  
 turned out that this amount was about four times too much.  
 The name of the commander of the 14th Division Major-General  
 Traklenko and the name of the commander of 389 Regiment Major  
 I got from a friend a Circassian [redacted] who actually  
 served in these units. I myself, did not know the location  
 these units and in which battles they actually had participated.  
 The names of the commander of the 1st Battalion Major-General  
 The name of the commander of the 3rd company Sergeant Major  
 names which I happened to remember. Buzhirov was the chief  
 our raion NKVD division. He was a sworn enemy of our Party  
 and I never can forget his name. Savchenko was the secretary  
 secretary of the party raion committee. His name I cannot  
 got either.

Why did I decide to drop those different stories?

I did not stop telling these stories and told the truth in-  
 stead because I was pushed with my back against the wall or  
 had gotten mixed up, but my conscience was bothering me. I  
 had come to the conclusion that my present status is not de-  
 termined by my rank of a lieutenant in the Soviet Union or  
 my education but only by my personal abilities. Among the other  
 participants on the courses there were people who never had  
 been a lieutenant, but still were held in high esteem by the  
 Americans. Besides that I reached the conclusion that the  
 Americans are not going to deport me as long as they value me.

Written October 22, 1950

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